



REPORT

BY THE

LORD PROVOST'S COMMITTEE,

TO THE

TOWN COUNCIL,

REGARDING THE

ROYAL INFIRMARY.

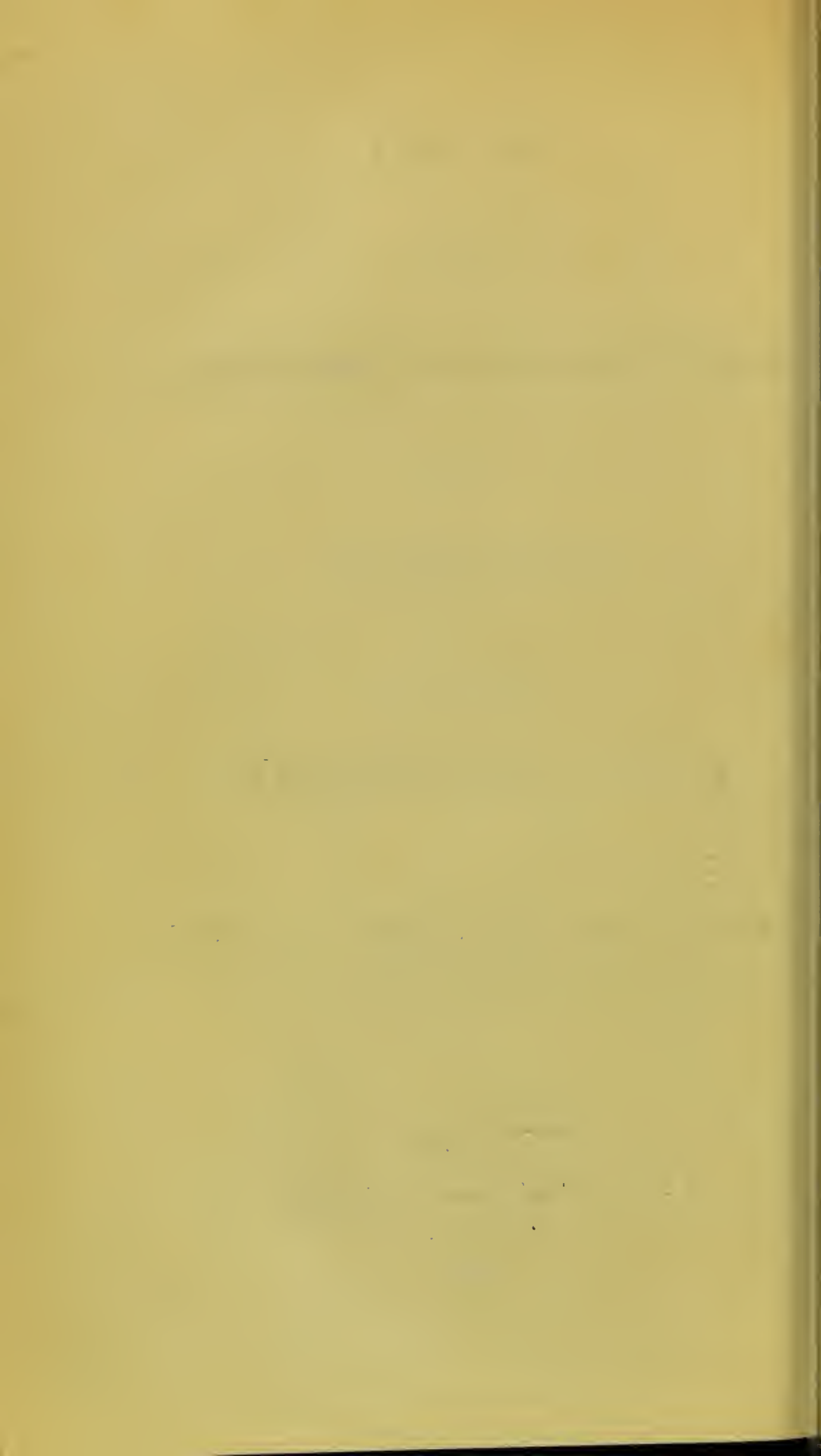
*(Unanimously approved of by the Magistrates and Council,
24th October 1837.)*

EDINBURGH:

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REPORT.

EDINBURGH, *6th October 1837.*

THE Lord Provost's Committee, having taken into consideration the remits of the 10th January and 7th February last, in regard to the Royal Infirmary, together with the last Annual Report, containing a view of its Property, Funds, and Expenditure, the Charter of the Incorporation, and the list of Managers since 1st January 1800, which had been procured from the Managers,—before proceeding to report upon these documents, wish to make an observation on the letter by which they were accompanied. In that letter the Clerk states, “As the Charter of Incorporation does not convey to the Town Council of Edinburgh the smallest right of controul over, or interference with, the management of the Royal Infirmary, the Managers direct me explicitly to state, that they comply with your Lordship's request in this latter matter from courtesy only; and that their compliance is in no way to be construed into any admission of the right of interference upon the part of the Town Council.” Without entering at present into the question of what controul or interference the Managers may admit on the part of the Town Council or any other public body, your Committee cannot consider any of the great institutions of the city as a matter of indifference to the representatives of the Community, and least of all the Royal Infirmary, of whose management two of the Council must always form a

part, and which annually derives the sum of £ 2000, (being more than one-third of the yearly revenue,) from the attendance of students, in consequence of the regulations of a course of study sanctioned by the Town Council as patrons of the University.

The occasion of the Council requesting information regarding the affairs of the Royal Infirmary, was the annually repeated application to them for their sanction to a collection at the church doors, accompanied by continual complaints of the deficiency of the income as compared with the expenditure. It occurred to many members of Council, that it might be worth while to inquire why an institution of such undoubted utility should be so deficient in funds; why an institution which had for nearly a century conferred such essential blessings on suffering humanity, and contributed at once to the advancement of medical knowledge and to the honour of our country, should not enjoy the support of the public as well as similar establishments in Glasgow, Manchester, and other large towns throughout the empire. The contributions and subscriptions of last year amounted only to £ 713 : 3 : 6, and this from the wealthy community of the metropolis and neighbourhood, all the inhabitants of which, rich as well as poor, are somehow or other benefited by the institution; the one class by the actual relief afforded to their sufferings, the other by the increase of medical and surgical knowledge, and by their dependents and domestics being properly cared for during the illness arising from accidents or infectious diseases.

One great reason for the little interest which the inhabitants of Edinburgh take in upholding the revenues of the Royal Infirmary, seems to your Committee to be the rigid manner in which the charter of incorporation has been acted upon, by which the system of self-election, or one body of managers choosing their successors, has been continued with the utmost strictness to the present hour, from the date of the charter in 1736, when twenty persons were named therein as managers till the first Monday of January following, on which day they

were to assemble between the hours of Two and Four afternoon, in the Borough-room of the City of Edinburgh, and they, or any seven of them, were to elect twenty managers, of whom the Provost of the City of Edinburgh, or, in his absence, the Dean of Guild, the President of the College of Physicians, and the Deacon-Convener, were to be *ex-officio* managers. The remaining seventeen were to be chosen from the following classes : Four from the College of Physicians, whereof two to be Professors of Medicine in the University ; the Professor of Anatomy ; two out of the Incorporation of Surgeons ; one out of the Senators of the College of Justice ; one out of the Faculty of Advocates ; one out of the Society of Clerks to the Signet ; one out of the Ministers of Edinburgh ; and six out of the number of the contributors to the Charity.

It was appointed by the charter, that the managers thus chosen on the first Monday of January 1737, were to assemble on the first Monday of January in the year following, and in like manner to elect and name their successors in the management, and so on yearly and each year, for ever.

It will be observed that managers are to be chosen from six different public bodies, but that they are not to be selected by the bodies themselves, but by the previous managers.

It might be supposed, that by the above arrangements the exclusive system is pretty well provided for ; but a very ingenious contrivance is introduced into the charter, by which the power of monopoly may be extended still farther. The twenty managers, when elected, choose twelve of their number to be *ordinary* managers, the remaining eight are called *extraordinary* managers. The ordinary managers, of whom five are a quorum, are appointed to meet four times a-year, and to have as many more meetings as they shall see needful ; and they may, as often as they shall see occasion, call meetings of the extraordinary managers for their advice and assistance. It appears that the ordinary managers are empowered to nominate the Treasurer and Clerk, and such other persons as they shall judge necessary to be employed in the service of

the Corporation, and to appoint them such salaries, fees, or rewards, as they, with the consent of the extraordinary managers, shall judge proper; and the ordinary managers may, at their pleasure, remove and discharge the said Treasurer, Clerk, and others so employed.

The list of Managers, ordinary and extraordinary, since the year 1800, shews very clearly the working of the system. Had new ordinary managers been chosen every year, (a plan by no means desirable,) the total number till this date would have been 456; but not more than 50 different individuals have filled that office, for a period of years varying from one year to 33 years. Eleven persons have been ordinary managers for 15 years and upwards, and eight of them for more than 20 years.

It is not insinuated that the gentlemen holding office were not men of the most unblemished integrity, and useful business habits. They have indeed devoted much valuable time to the performance of their duties, and they have been most attentive to the interests of the poor, for whom the Infirmary was erected; but the public is apt to look with disapprobation on a system of such rigid self-election, as throws the whole management of a great public charity into the hands of a few individuals for a long series of years.

Your Committee are of opinion, that the true way of securing the confidence, and hence the enlarged contributions of the Public, is to open up in a great degree the management, and to give to the Contributors, and to the public bodies from whom the managers are chosen, a more direct controul and inspection than they at present enjoy. It appears that, even with the present charter, this may be in a great measure accomplished. The general Court of Contributors, who meet annually on the first Monday of January, have it in their power to make bye-laws, not inconsistent with the spirit of the charter, or the laws of the realm. Let them make a law, that at a convenient period previous to the annual election, the public bodies, out of whom Managers are to be chosen, should be requested to name and recommend indivi-

duals to be Managers ; that all contributors of one guinea annually and upwards, or of a slump sum of L. 5 as a composition for annual payments, should meet in the “ Burgh Court Room,” as the charter expresses it, and there choose six persons to be recommended to the Managers ; and that on the first Monday of January, the Managers then in office should exercise their power to choose their successors, in conformity with the recommendations then given in. The terms of the Charter will thus be complied with ; and your Committee have such confidence in the benevolence and public spirit of their fellow-citizens, that they believe the funds of the Royal Infirmary will be greatly increased, and the necessity for collections at the church doors, and visits from house to house, superseded ; while many wealthy and active citizens will be happy to devote both their time and their money to the interests of the great establishment, which is productive of incalculable benefit to the rich as well as to the poor.

THOS. SAWERS, PRESES.



